

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will explore the ethnic and cultural differences that affect family systems.

Culture refers to a learned pattern of thought and behavior that is passed from one generation to the next. These patterns are methods for meeting human needs and solving problems of living. Even though these methods may vary greatly from the chosen methods of others, they have value and are important to the culture.

Related to culture is ethnicity. An ethnic group consists of a group of people who identify with others in a group through common culture, language, religion, ancestry, physical appearance, or some combination of such characteristics. People outside the group also recognize this commonality. Members of an ethnic group see themselves as sharing the same or very similar past and present and also perceive sharing the same future.

Some ethnic groups are also a minority group. The minority group is seen as a part of the ethnic group system but is viewed as underprivileged, and having a low status. Minority group status has a very powerful impact on a person's behavior and on their opportunity for socio-economic advancement. Members of a minority group typically have four things in common:

- Physical or cultural characteristics which distinguish them from the dominant group;
- Membership in the minority group is not voluntary;
- Experience a strong sense of solidarity with other group members; and
- Experience prejudice and/or discrimination.

It is helpful to understand the difference between prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice refers to a person's unfavorable beliefs and attitudes toward a particular group. Discrimination refers to behavior and actions that are unfavorable toward a group that deprives them of certain rights and opportunities. Being prejudiced does not always lead to discrimination. Also, it is possible to discriminate without being prejudiced. This may occur when a person acts out of ignorance, or when an insensitive policy or procedure directs them.

It is difficult to completely rid ourselves of prejudice. We all acquire some prejudgments during our upbringing. It is possible, and necessary, for Children's Service Workers to be aware of their prejudices and refrain from acts of discrimination. The following behaviors are characteristic of professionals who are prejudiced in their thinking:

- Stereotyped explanations are given for the behavior of persons of a specific ethnic or minority group.
- The same helping strategies are used for all clients in that group.

- The importance of cultural and ethnicity are easily dismissed, or are used to explain all behavior.
- Discussions of culture are avoided or are talked about constantly.

Some of the common techniques used to help people may not be effective cross-culturally. Different groups may have different expectations as to what constitutes “help”. This may make it even more difficult to select appropriate intervention tools. For example:

- Self-disclosure may be difficult between dominant culture workers and discriminated minority groups, since it presumes a degree of trust which may not be there.
- Reflection, reaching for feelings, or asking for insights may appear intrusive.
- Some groups may view help seeking as shameful and may not disclose personal problems.
- Many groups may expect a more active helping relationship with the worker offering advice and tangible assistance.

Techniques such as self-talk, imagery, and challenging irrational beliefs may run counter to important cultural values and beliefs.

The Children’s Service Worker should be aware that minority children and teenagers make up a disproportionate amount of the out-of-home care population.

In making decisions on appropriate treatment and possible out-of-home placement, the Children’s Service Worker must be aware of the following important points:

- A child's culture plays an important role in his/her development;
- Ignorance or lack of understanding of a particular culture can influence a decision in favor of a child's out-of-home placement. The Children’s Service worker's knowledge of customs, religious beliefs and practices, educational practices, housekeeping standards and eating patterns are essential before the best decision can be made;
- Parents in minority groups may feel more threatened with the possibility that a child may be removed and need reassurance and clarification about what problems are seen as minor and what problems could result in the removal of the child;
- A Children’s Service Worker may need to become an advocate for the minority family and may need to educate public officials in the community who have misconceptions about a certain group.

MEMORANDA HISTORY: